The Report Committee for Kiara Icely Davis
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Sites of Humanism: Intimate Encounters within Black Feminist Geographies

APPROVED BY
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:

Samantha Pinto, Supervisor

Helena Woodard

Sites of Humanism: Intimate Encounters Within Black Feminist Geographies

by

Kiara Icely Davis

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Abstract

Sites of Humanism: Intimate Encounters Within Black Feminist Geographies

Kiara Icely Davis, M.A.

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Supervisor: Samantha Pinto

Sites of Humanism: Intimate Encounters Within Black Feminist Geographies explores Black women's creation and engagement with places and spaces. In particular, these selected essays consider Black women's ability to turn oppressive or constraining structures, systems, and theories of knowledge into what Dr. Ashanté Reese calls, spaces of "containment but not confinement." The collection begins by reflecting on two Black geographical frameworks of the human problem, W.E.B. Du Bois' Veil/veil and Sylvia Wynter's demonic. I consider material accounts of these racialized geographies in *The Souls of Black Folk* and Harriet Ann Jacobs' slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. The piece closes by reading Saidiya Hartman's use of critical fabulation in *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* as an aspect of the demonic grounds, and a site of opportunity for an important epistemological break for our understanding of the human. The next essay analyzes Black exploitation in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*. Film offers a level of visibility that is reminiscent of Western geographic practices that privilege seeing as knowing. Additionally, photographs of two Black women are included in the

film, yet there are not any Black women characters. The film reminded me of the demonic, and I wondered what did it mean for these photographs to be included, and could they be read oppositionally? The final paper posits that the Humanities have an integral role in imagining *being* human anew. In particular, the novel is a medium of possibility. Its form can reach the conceptual crevices and excesses that lie beyond our epistemic boundaries. I read Rivers Solomon's *An Unkindness of Ghosts* as an ushering in of Sylvia Wynter's demonic.

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Introduction

BEGINNINGS

Sites of Humanism: Intimate Encounters Within Black Feminist Geographies explores Black women's creation and engagement with places and spaces. In particular, these selected essays consider Black women's ability to turn oppressive or constraining structures, systems, and epistemologies into what Dr. Ashanté Reese calls, spaces of "containment but not confinement." The origins of this portfolio began in a seminar titled "Alienation and Freedom," taught by Dr. Bedour Alagraa. The course invited us to consider the human as an embodied geography - a site that contains both alienation and freedom. Throughout the semester, we traced the problem of the human (its inability to account for the inclusion of all people) through traditional European Enlightenment ideals, and using radical transnational Black discourses and text, we sought a different genealogy of the human. The course foregrounded Caribbean anticolonial writers and thinkers such as Sylvia Wynter, Frantz Fanon, and Aimé Césaire. This foci on the Caribbean highlighted the roles migration, mobility, diaspora and spatiality play in liberation, rebellion, and resistance. From this vantage point, what I had always understood as the absoluteness of geography, became an opening for remapping the very ground beneath our feet.

As the course went on, each of the texts built upon and with one another, expanding the dialectic of the language and representations of the human. The way Black women's bodies replicated and multiplied this paradox of being human was particularly interesting. Black women writer's discourse occupied gendered, raced spaces in a way that was distinctly their own. Across time, location, and genre Black women found ways to critique and resist the restraints that were mapped onto them. From the Clearing in

Beloved, to Marie-Sophie's mythic creation of Texaco, Harriet Ann Jacobs' imprisonment in the garret, Saidiya Hartman's focus on the chorine girl finding ways to live otherwise in the Black tenement, and ending with Sylvia Wynter rendering Black women's absence in conceptions of Man's gendered Other as evidence of possibility for a new way of being human, Black feminist geographies reveal the incompleteness of our modern conception of the human and unsettle our traditional methods of spatiality. I believe Black women's unique spatial practices within dominant geographic structures make visible alternative ways of imagining our historical, political, raced, and sexed geographical arrangements.

REFLECTION

This portfolio is meant to showcase my own evolving questions about Black feminist geographies. Each of the papers below portrays my growing understanding of the field. The papers build upon one another as I consider Black women's spatial practices from varied perspectives. The portfolio begins with an essay titled, "Laying the Grounds of Humanism: Black Lives, Praxis and Speculative Fiction" from the Alienation and Freedom seminar mentioned above. This essay was my first long, graduate work and also my first attempt at exploring Black geographic theorizations. In the paper, I reflect on two Black geographical frameworks of the human problem, W.E.B. Du Bois' Veil/veil and Sylvia Wynter's demonic. I consider material accounts of these racialized geographies in *The Souls of Black Folk* and Harriet Ann Jacobs' slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. The piece closes by reading Saidiya Hartman's use of critical fabulation in *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* as an aspect of the demonic, and a site of opportunity for an important epistemological break for our understanding of the human. Notably, my newness to the field is evident in the sources I chose for my paper.

At that point in my graduate experience, the only geographical texts I was familiar with were the ones provided in the seminar.

The next essay, "Black Wo/Man's Burden: Black Characters in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining,"* analyzes Black exploitation in the film. I began thinking about film as another textual medium during the middle of my program. Film offered a level of visibility that was reminiscent of Western geographic practices that privilege seeing as knowing. Additionally, I was interested in Black women's inclusion in "white" films. Why were they included? What role did they play? What labor did they do? Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* struck me with its violent depictions of American life. I wondered at the function of Black people in the film and was especially intrigued by the photographs of the framed Black women in Dick Hallorann's room. The film reminded me of the demonic, and I wondered what did it mean for Black women's likeness to be included in a film that did not include their corporeal or subjective presence.

The final paper, "Ad mutationem: Homo Narrans and Autopoietic in *An Unkindness of Ghosts,*" comes from the last semester of my graduate program, where I found myself grappling with the complex interactions between race, time, and space and how thinking of these dimensions in a non-linear fashion might open up my readings of texts. In particular, I was interested in how holding all of these together at once might reveal unexpected connections, intimacy, and life. The paper posits that the Humanities have an integral role in imagining *being* human anew. The novel is a medium of possibility. Its form can reach the conceptual crevices and excesses that lie beyond our epistemic boundaries. I read Rivers Solomon's *An Unkindness of Ghosts* as an ushering in of Sylvia Wynter's demonic.

Chapter 1: Laying the Grounds of Humanism: Black Lives, Praxis and Speculative Fiction

In his work *The Souls of Black Folk,* W.E.B. Du Bois writes, "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line." The bounds of the color line continue to separate the world today. Whiteness and Blackness, Human and Other remain delineated along Enlightenment conceptions of who is human. These flawed ideas of humanism are the basis for enslavement and its aftereffects, which are still negatively impacting us all. In order to consider the boundaries of Human and Other, I will be exploring works by W.E.B. Du Bois, Sylvia Wynter, Harriet Ann Jacobs, and Saidiya Hartman. I will begin by examining the way each theorist traces humanism's exclusion of Black people. In *The Souls of Black Folk,* W.E.B. Du Bois names this limitation the Negro Problem, and introduces the concept of the Veil/veil as the social, physical, and existential result of the Negro Problem (Du Bois, "Souls"). In the Afterword of *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*, titled "Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's Woman," Sylvia Wynter explains the inadequacy of humanism as it is conceived in our modern world as being caused by a partial epistemological transformation (365). Wynter lays bare these inadequacies by setting the ground of the "demonic," from which the native resides. Both Du Bois and Wynter seem to suggest that the language they use to describe the realm Black people operate from is not only conceptual, but also a tangible, material site from which social, economic, and political realities emerge.

Next, I will consider how and if these two theories privilege Black people by applying them to biographical and critically fabulated, literary artistic and imaginative expressions of Black lives. I will look at examples from W.E.B. Du Bois' essays in *The Souls of Black Folk* and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Ann Jacobs. I believe it is important to explore these two realms in the creative as well as non-fictional genres because of the emphasis Du Bois and Wynter place on artistic works. Du Bois discusses the role artwork plays in authoring culture in his description of the Black artisan's double aimed paradox. The Black artist strives to depict his or her unique perspective, while simultaneously being told that perspective is useless by the broader audience (Du Bois, "Souls"). Wynter highlights the importance of literary artistic work by reading Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, as a signifier of the epistemological break that ushered in the modern world.

This exploration of the artistic and nonfictional becomes particularly important in the final section, where I will consider Saidiya Hartman's article, "Venus in Two Acts," and her newest book, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval,* as an extension and critique of some W.E.B. Du Bois' core assumptions about agency within and shrouded by the Veil/veil, as well as his historical, social and political intervening work, *Black Reconstruction*. In doing so, I examine one example of the Black woman paradox, and posit that Black women's unique position in society makes them central to finding a solution to the humanism problem. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* recaptures the lives of ordinary young Black women in Philadelphia and New York City at the beginning of the twentieth

century. Hartman uses the violent and incomplete archive of social worker files, police reports, and slum photography combined with these young women's radical imagination and insistence to live otherwise, to reveal their roles as political agents. She names this method, critical fabulation. I chose *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*, because Hartman's extensive archival research, her methodology of critical fabulation, and her grounding in Black feminist theory make the work a coalescence of theory, biographical and speculative. This combination of praxis, theory, and imagination seems to be a groundbreaking way to consider the implication of a humanism grounded in Black feminist theory and epistemology. With this grounding, I believe we can make an important epistemological break from the popular Western episteme, and the more traditional Black Studies episteme, and provide a new way of considering language and meaning of the human.

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois recollects the day during his childhood where he realized his life was shrouded in darkness by a veil that separated him from the treasures of the white world. During his childhood, he held all that lay beyond the veil in contempt and lived above it in a "region of blue sky and great wandering shadows." That this transcendence was not complete is shown in the following sentence where he acknowledges that his sky was bluest when he was more successful than his white classmates. This boyhood pursuit of surpassing the veil is one that continued to develop as a passion for knowledge. Du Bois goes on to assert that his veiled existence is not unique, but a characteristic of all Black people, "...the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil…" (Du Bois, "Souls"*).* This introduction of the veil first as he experienced it,

and then as a reality for Black people in general suggests that one of *The Souls of Black Folk* purposes is to use Du Bois' own life as an allegorical example for the Black populace as a whole.

One of the important features of Du Bois description as the barrier between the Black and white worlds being a veil, is the permeability of the material. While the wearer is shrouded in darkness, it is not completely opaque, and only partially obstructs the outside world. The wearer of the veil is "gifted with second sight of the American world – a world which yields him no self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world" (Du Bois, "Souls"). When a veiled person looks in the mirror, they cannot know their true features. Similarly, Du Bois' concept of the veil suggests Black people being beneath its shroud prevents them from fully knowing or possessing their interiority. Du Bois states that the effect of this is a double consciousness. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, it appears the longing of the Black American has always been "to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self" and ultimately to "be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, and to husband and use his best powers" (Du Bois, "Souls"). Du Bois' description of the paradox of the veil simultaneously providing the "gift" of second sight and the incompleteness of double consciousness does not give the impression of being a positive. The veil does not appear to lend its wearers a significant level of autonomy. Moreover, the only way for Black people to become their "better and truer sel[ves]" is to transcend the veil entirely.

The permeability of the Veil also impacts the way the Black and white worlds influence each other. In the second chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*, "Of the Wings of Atalanta," Du Bois tells the story of the industrialization of the city of Atlanta alongside the Greek mythological story of the huntress Atalanta, an exceptional athlete who sought to avoid marriage by only agreeing to marry a man who could beat her in a footrace. Atalanta raced the grandson of Poseidon, Hippomenes, who rolled three golden apples in front of her to distract her whenever she drew ahead. Ultimately, Hippomenes catches Atalanta who has now forgotten about the ideals which led her to want to avoid marriage and is in love with Hippomenes from the first embrace. Du Bois argues that similarly, the South is letting go of its chance to pursue Truth, Goodness, and Beauty for the lure of material wealth (Du Bois, "Souls").

For Du Bois, the implication of the South aspiring to wealth as the measure of all success is also dire for the Black world beyond the Veil. Because the South does not think of the Black American, when Black Americans come to think of themselves it will be in the incomplete self-consciousness discussed above. Instead of realizing the error of the Southern white world's quest for material wealth, the Black world will model itself after it, striving for the prizes of the white world. Du Bois sees the displacement of the Preacher and Teacher in Black communities as a realization of the effects of industrialization on the Black world. According to him, the Preacher and Teacher represent ideals of a "strife for another and juster world, the vague dream of righteousness, and the mystery of knowing…" (Du Bois, "Souls"). These righteous ideals that Du Bois mentions are laden with scriptural references and sacrificial language. Du

Bois calls for the Black world to be built on knowledge and culture, Patience, Humility, Right, and Truth. The proper nouns signify that these are universal, actual virtues independent of any sort of interpretation, or flexibility. I cannot help but wonder – where are the wayward within these visions of righteousness? Where do the impoverished and those who are not formally educated reside?

Along with telling his own story as a young schoolboy, teacher, and sociologist, Du Bois also reveals life beyond the Veil in the form of biographical accounts of the lives of Black people. These accounts illuminate the way the Veil is a barrier to success, opportunity, and happiness. Indeed, even what appears to be progress is palled by the shadow of the Veil. Of particular note is the chapter, "Of the Meaning of Progress" which begins with Du Bois fondly recounting the story of his time as a new schoolteacher in the hills of Tennessee. He describes several of his thirty students, and their expectant countenance and faith in him as their teacher. Overall, he loved his school. As the chapter continues, Du Bois narrates their personalities, family dynamics, hopes, and dreams. Most importantly, he tells of the hunger of his young students – who were sharpened by school and "half-awakened" thought. Unfortunately for them they were, "born without and beyond the World…their weak wings beat against their barriers – barriers of caste, of youth, of life; at last in dangerous moments, against everything that opposed even a whim." As the chapter continues, Du Bois maps the outline of those barriers.

Du Bois returns to his narration of life in the rolling Tennessee hills ten years later. This section of the chapter begins bleakly, with him learning one of his most eager students, Josie, is dead. As he progresses through each of the students he mentioned

earlier, the tone remains bleak. One former student is described as a, “lazy Baptist preacher,” one young woman is picking corn, another is a worried mother whose main source of pride appears to be her neat cabin and thrifty husband. Indeed, even the events that you would expect to be positive are negative. The log schoolhouse is larger with a bigger blackboard, yet Du Bois notes a broken glass window and a mournful old stone. One family succeeded in getting the hundred acres they had always wanted, but they were in debt and unhappy, the father weakening, the mother having lost her strong physique. The chapter goes on to end with Death.

This theme of Life beyond the Veil being closely and inextricably linked with Death continues in the chapter “Of the Passing of the First-Born,” where Du Bois retells the life, and tragic early death of his son. Once again, the pervasiveness of the Veil is illustrated. Du Bois’ son was born fair skinned, fair haired, in Massachusetts. Even so, Du Bois sees “the shadow of the Veil” as it falls across his baby. He recognizes “the cold city towering above the blood-red land.” The imagery here is important, because even the birth of the first-born child, a time that you would expect to be full of expectant firsts and representative of new beginnings is within the shadow of the Veil. The horror of the reality of Black life beyond the Veil, is revealed in the moment where Du Bois feels an “awful gladness” at his son’s passing that means he has successfully escaped the bondage of the Veil. Du Bois’ own soul whispered to him saying, “Not dead, not dead, but escaped; not bond, but free.” As he laments why it was his son, and not him, or one of the wretched who passed away, Death feels inevitable for Black people. If a toddler, only shadowed by the Veil, yet whose sun had not been darkened by the knowledge of the veil

and the implications that had for his humanity, might die… If a son, who Love sat by his cradle and Wisdom ready to speak in his ear, might die... Whether it be the slow, insidious death that killed Josie from compounding sorrows and barriers, or the swift, unexpected death of a young child, *The Souls of Black Folk*, illustrates the ways Black Life is tethered to Black Death. Perhaps even more illuminating is the way Du Bois says goodbye to his son, telling him to sleep until he sleeps and awakens to his pattering feet – above the Veil.

The Souls of Black Folk ends with a chapter on Black Sorrow Songs. He calls these "the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side the seas" and the "spiritual heritage of the nation and the greatest gift of the Negro people." In doing so, he reminds the reader that if the Veil is permeable, then Black Americans have some impact on the white world as well. He notes, that "like all primitive folk, the slave stood near to Nature's heart." In this way, it is through the descriptions of the enslaved, from the place beyond the Veil, where America's landscape is truly described. The chapter goes on to narrate the genealogy of the Sorrow Songs through fear, goodbyes, love, death, religion, and hope. As it does so Du Bois notes that it develops from African music, to Afro-American music, to a blending of Black people's music with that "heard in the foster land…the elements are both Negro and Caucasian." He extends his analysis of this development to suggest that the songs of white America have been influenced by those of the enslaved as well. *The Souls of Black Folk* seems to end on a hopeful note. In pulling back the Veil, Du Bois reveals to both Black and white Americans the realities of Black consciousness and suggests that there is a possibility to render it entirely. Still, in the

meantime life within/beneath the veil/Veil continues to appear like a life of half-consciousness and Death.

Shifting to Sylvia Wynter's "Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's Woman," I will examine how Wynter characterizes the Demonic Ground from which Caliban's (Black) woman resides. Wynter first explores an example of Black women's paradox through analyzing Caribbean women writers'/critics' sameness and difference to feminism. While the Caribbean women share gender and class with their European and Euro American counterparts, the variable of race "strongly demarcates the situation of the Caribbean women intelligentsia, whether Black or white, from that of their Western/Euro American counterparts" (Wynter 356). Throughout the article, Wynter argues that inserting race into the understanding of numerous "isms" dislodges the modern episteme of knowledge and sets the preliminary ground for a post-modern understanding of the human.

Wynter sets the foundation of this new ground by analyzing Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as the foundation for modern Western episteme. This modern ground is inhabited by homo economics, the modern genre of Man who was created when secular conceptions of man developed following the European Enlightenment (Wynter 357). Wynter argues that a similar, incomplete mutation of Man occurred with Western Europe's expansion into the New World, calling this an:

> …ostensible difference in 'natural' substance which, for the first time in history was no longer primarily encoded in the male/female gender division as it had been…but now in the cultural-physiognomic variations between the dominant

> expanding European civilization and the non-Western peoples that…it would now stigmatize as natives. (Wynter 358)

By examining the relationship between the Native (Negro) character, Caliban, to the differently raced woman character, Miranda, Wynter exhibits that "sex-gender attributes are no longer the primary index of 'deferent' difference" (Wynter 358). Therefore, there is a new category of the human. There is Man (and his woman, Miranda), and the subordinated native, or Other.

However, in the play the Native woman is never named. Logically, she must exist, as Caliban exists and he must have a mother, as well as a differently gendered other for reproductive purposes. However, Caliban's woman is disappeared by the limits of the current episteme. Wynter asserts that this silenced and missing Other woman, is from the same paradoxical sameness and difference discourse with which Black American women and the 'native' Caribbean intelligentsia engage with feminism and womanism (363). This draws attention to:

> the insufficiency of all existing theoretical interpretive models both to 'voice the hitherto silenced ground of the experience of 'native' Caribbean women and Black American women as the ground of Caliban's woman, and to de-code the system of meanings of that other discourse, which has imposed this mode of silence for some five centuries. (Wynter 363)

In other words, the code for this woman lies outside of our current popular episteme, and outside of traditional constructs of femininity. Operating within this other terrain, which

does not include the limitations of the current epistemic conception of Man, will form the basis for the next understanding of human life.

In her book, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Harriet Jacobs provides an autobiographical account of her time as an enslaved woman, a runaway, and eventually as a free woman living in the North. Jacobs' account of her time as a fugitive slave is of particular use for a consideration of Wynter's concept of the demonic for a number of reasons. Harriet Jacobs embodies multiple aspects of the paradox which breaks the modern epistemic conception. The purpose of her flight is due to the sexualized-commodified construct slavery created for enslaved women. Jacobs is both not viewed as a person (and therefore not a woman), and also endangered by her owner's demanding of her sexualized body. Additionally, her seven years spent hiding in the garret provide another example of this paradox. During her confinement in the garret, Jacobs withstands extreme physical agony in the form of sickness, bugs, and extreme cold. She also undergoes the psychological stress of being almost completely isolated and fearing for the lives of her children as retribution for her fugitivity. She describes the garret as "oppressive," her "wretched hiding place," and her little cell (Jacobs 95 – 101). Despite these ailments, she would have chosen the garret, rather than her lot as a slave (Jacobs 95).

Jacobs' accounting of the garret as an account from the demonic ground continues with the way her presence in the space eschews modern epistemic understandings of power and geography. Within the garret, Jacobs has the ability to look and see out into the town but is secluded from the return of the white gaze. This sort of vantage point

provides Jacobs with the gifted sight into the white world of the slave owner, without subjecting her to the shrouding of her own consciousness by seeing herself as she would be seen by them. Instead, Jacobs is able to develop her interiority entirely on her own. In this way, Jacobs occupies a space outside of the modern conception of the world. Additionally, as her fugitivity extends, she uses her position to send fake correspondence placing her in different locations. In doing so, she illustrates the limitations of the modern conception of geography in two ways. Firstly, the location of the garret is outside of the slave owner's conception of geography; where those places that are not mapped (and therefore visualized) do not exist. Secondly, by falsifying her location through fake correspondence, she dislodges the actualization of geography. Instead of location and geography being absolute, she shows that it is constructed and produced. Jacobs' narrative of her time in the garret provides an ideal use case for Wynter's theory of the demonic.

Before moving onto analyzing Saidiya Hartman's works, I would like to juxtapose Du Bois' veil/Veil and Wynter's demonic grounds to consider how one becomes a part of each realm, as well as how each theory handles permeability and the effective and affective characteristics of their theorized realms. I believe this is important to center my analysis of the theories. In both concepts, a person's presence in the realm seems to be an inevitability of the inadequacy of the current conception of Man. For Wynter, this is shown through the silence/absence of the Native woman. Although Du Bois does not address the issue of the Western concept of humanity as thoroughly as he does in *Black Reconstruction*, *The Souls of Black Folk* discusses the issue of the color-

line and provides an explanation for how that line creates the Negro Problem which forces Black people beyond and beneath the Veil/veil. Unlike Du Bois' conception of the veil/Veil, the demonic ground does not appear to be permeable. Instead, it is an entirely different terrain which cannot be understood or explained by the current discourse or vocabulary of Man. Additionally, whereas the overall result of being beneath the veil, or beyond the Veil seems to be one of a lack of opportunity, lack of success, and lack of a complete, knowable and realized self-consciousness, the demonic functions as a place filled with the promise of being the basis for the discourse and population of a new Man. I believe the distinction between how permeability and possibilities within the Black realm are theorized by the two concepts is an important one for Black feminist theorists. Although Sylvia Wynter continues the anti-colonial intellectual legacy of Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon, and does not describe the demonic as a Black feminist geography, her mapping of the terrain of the demonic as outside the hegemonic, and also one with the potential resources for the inhabitance of a new and more human man, make the theory particularly suited for some of the generative work that is part of Black feminist epistemology.

Now, I will consider how Hartman both extends and dislodges Du Bois' conception of the man. In her article "Venus in Two Acts" and her book *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval,* Saidiya Hartman studies the violence of the archive by investigating the lives of Black women. In doing so, she illuminates the unique position that Black women have in liberation and freedom. Hartman's exploration of the tension between freedom and

confinement, autonomy and forced choices, and the nuance seen in acts of resistance and rebellion, referred to as waywardness, with Black women at their center takes the principles that have been explored by Du Bois and stretches them to address Black women's role in liberation. Her two works illustrate the way Black women's past has been inextricably tied to Black radicalism. "Venus in Two Acts" introduces the concept of Black Venus and her distinctive position as "the convergence of terror and pleasure in the libidinal economy of slavery" (Hartman 1) and *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* captures her evolution into the Chorine girl, her loophole of retreat and her life which is exhibited through her acts of resistance.

In *Black Reconstruction* W.E.B. Du Bois not only challenges and dismantles the public historic norm of the Civil War and Reconstruction, he also places enslaved Black people at the center of the Civil War and modernity. One of the ways he posits this, is through his definition of the enslaved person as both property and labor, "slaves were not considered men...They were devisable like any other chattel" (Du Bois, 10). Additionally, he writes, "it was thus the black worker, as founding stone of a new economic system in the nineteenth century and for the modern world" (Du Bois 15). In doing so, Du Bois' applies Marxist theory in new ways. If the exploitation of the laborer in capitalist society leads to a fragmented man, one who is alienated and dehumanized, then what of the man who is both labor and commodity? Du Bois' analysis of the totality of enslaved Black people makes them the most alienated and dehumanized worker, and therefore the catalyst for a social and economic revolution. Hartman appears to take Du Bois' assertion and apply it even more specifically to

Black women. "Venus in Two Acts" begins with Hartman's investigation of the symbolic Black Venus: the historical representation of enslaved women as sexual commodities. The importance of this representation is two-fold. First, it is an acknowledgement that the exorbitant violence, torture, and terror propagated onto enslaved Black women was not an individualized occurrence, but rather a cornerstone of slavery (Hartman, "Venus" 5-6). Second, it reveals how enslaved Black women were viewed as both property, and as a worker who was essential to the success of the capitalist society - just as Du Bois did in *Black Reconstruction.*

Hartman traces the totality of Black Venus through the plantation where she labored, perhaps as field worker, house worker, concubine, bed wench, broodmare etc., and her continued role as property of the slave master; a concept which "extended to her reproductive capacity and maternity was also targeted and deemed the property of slave-owners; the womb was made into a factory and children transformed into commodities for the market" (Hartman "Wayward Lives" 186). In the decades following Reconstruction, supposedly free Black women continued to fulfill this double role as the voiceless Chorine, their labor having evolved to roles such as laundress, servant-girl, and the ever-popular "prostitute." While they were no longer born property, over-surveillance and corrupt policing often led to incarceration and becoming property of the state. Even the confines of domestic servitude held the stench of slavery, "No need to pretend about its dangers. Everyone knew of a girl fired and sent away before she was too big with belly. The kitchen was the field and the brothel. No need to sugarcoat the fact: Black women were still in the

house of bondage" (Hartman, "Wayward Lives" 47). The discussion of the various "unfree states" Black women continued to hold in society is also exemplified by the continued maternal inheritance. The commodification of Venus' womb meant that her children, no matter the status of the father, inherited her enslaved status. During Reconstruction, Black women continued to "follow the condition of the mother," with the case against the mother being sufficient for risk of arrest and confinement for the daughter (Hartman, "Wayward Lives" 72). Hartman's exposure of the totality of Black women from the plantation to the industrial society is significant because it recenters W.E.B. Du Bois' stretching of Marxist analysis as it applied to the enslaved Black man, even further to include the subject of the Black woman.

Along with establishing Black people as the quintessential laborer, both W.E.B. Du Bois and Saidiya Hartman explore the concept of a material and psychosocial barrier between Black people and white people that both privileges and alienates Black people. Du Bois makes reference to the shrouded second sight that Black people may possess beneath the veil, "beneath the Veil lay right and wrong, vengeance and love, and sometimes throwing aside the veil, a soul of sweet Beauty and Truth stood revealed" (Du Bois, “Black Reconstruction” 14). Additionally, his abrupt shift from the calculated, statistical recitation of institutional and social history to poetic, powerful prose as he describes what emancipation meant for newly freed Black people in the chapter titled "Coming of the Lord" puts the reader in mind of him describing it in their own language; lifting the shroud and speaking all of the wonderful truth beneath it.

For Hartman, the barrier is formed in the enclosed spaces within the Black slum or Black ghetto. Her description of the spaces in the Black city-within-a-city, call to mind the paradox of space that is discussed in the theories above, and particularly in the garret that Harriet Ann Jacobs was confined to for seven years. The hallway in a Black tenement is described as "narrow...two walls threatening to squeeze and crush you into nothingness" and also, "...a clearing inside the tenement" (Hartman, "Wayward" 22-23). It is simultaneously a place for lively firsts like tongue kisses, and one that reminds you:

> *Negro don't even try to live...* It is ugly and brutalizing and it is where you stay. It doesn't matter if you don't love the place; you love the people residing there. It is as close to a home as you'll get, it is a transient resting place, an impossible refuge...It is the liminal zone between the inside and the outside for the one who stays in the ghetto;the reformer documenting the habitat of the poor passes through without noticing it, failing to see what can be created in cramped space. (Hartman, "Wayward" 23)

The walls of the tenement, and the overall community of the ghetto is not a world apart. While it is not quite as privileged as the garret, it is also a position within the known geography, and its boundaries are not entirely knowable by the white gaze. Within their bounds lie possibility. While these places restrict Black women to the ugly realities of poverty, lack of opportunity, physical and sexual trauma, as with Harriet Ann Jacobs' garret, they are the only places they have any chance of escaping

the surveillance of the white gaze (although their refuge is sometimes invaded). Additionally, they are also one of the only places they have a measure of something resembling autonomy or the “loophole of retreat.”

Hartman challenges Du Bois’ depiction of life beyond the Veil inevitably equaling death or some sort of inhibited consciousness. Within the loophole of retreat, Black women commit acts of resistance and "open rebellion." Hartman again uncovers the path of this resistance from the barracoon, to the slave ship, the plantation and Reconstruction, "where some fought, some jumped, some refused to eat. Others set the plantation and the fields on fire, poisoned the master" (Hartman, "Wayward Lives" 230). During Reconstruction, Black women expressed their resistance through sexual experimentation, reproductive choice, the mutual aid they provided each other, and their very audacity to live.

In the chapter “The Atlas of the Wayward,” Hartman critiques and overturns Du Bois’ insistence on religious and moralistic ideals as the basis for the Black community. Hartman explores the Black ghetto, and particularly the lives of wayward young women, from Du Bois’ perspective. She represents Du Bois’ interpretation of the slum as “…a symptom of greater social and historical problems” which would in time become the ghetto “…a racial enclosure, an open-air prison” (Hartman, “Wayward” 89). As she narrates the acts he witnesses, she draws attention to one he misses, “not seen from his window were the women gathered in the courtyard, drinking cups of beer and playing cards. In one another’s eyes they were smart, crazy, wild, not to be messed with” (Hartman 95). She goes on to say

that even if he had seen these women, he still might have mistaken their nature. Hartman seems to suggest that Du Bois misinterprets young Black women's expressions of a form of autonomy in their insistence on a life "qualitatively different from the one that had been scripted for them," because he tries to capture them with the methodologies of Western epistemes and judges them using the ideals of that episteme as well. The mapping techniques, statistics, and surveys he employed were the tools of the West, which have been dislodged throughout this paper. These same ideals were not enough to conceptualize Black Americans as human, and ones that Du Bois himself could not live up to (Hartman, "Wayward" 119).

In addition to acts of resistance, Hartman also interprets Black women as political agents capable of labor movements. Du Bois recognized that the Great Migration during the late 19th and early 20th century was a second wave of the general strike that occurred during the Civil War. The Great Migration was described as, "...again a way of saying 'no' to the known world and the vestiges of slavery. The Negro was on strike. By 1920, it was undeniable. The small movement of black folk from the south, which began as early as the 1880s, had become a mass movement. It was nothing short of a refusal of the plantation regime" (Hartman, "Wayward Lives" 108). Once again, Hartman takes Du Bois' analysis and examines it with Black women at its center. Young Black women migrated North to follow their dreams and start a new life away from the plantation. Black women rebelled against the "'the personal degradation of their work' and 'unjust labor conditions,'" with strikes, refusing to work, frequently changing employers, and being purposefully unreliable

(Hartman, "Wayward Lives" 232). Even while incarcerated, they committed to "noise strikes" and "vocal outbreaks," which were described as a "soundscape of rebellion and refusal" (Hartman, "Wayward Lives" 279). During the Great Migration, Black people again recognized the connection between their political and economic power, and Black women were a part of the movement.

Saidiya Hartman reveals the Black Woman Paradox in the ways they are both “surplus Negro women,” yet due to their position in society do not possess the full status of a woman” (Hartman, “Wayward” 187-189); the way the space they live within is both constraining and oppressive and a form of liberation; and the “beauty of things taken and given by those living in defeat” (Hartman 63). Hartman not only makes the necessity of Black women's inclusion in Black liberation from a historical perspective evident, but also commits an act of resistance from the present into the telling of the past. Hartman shows us that the value of Black Venus and the Chorine is "in illuminating the way in which our age is tethered to hers" (Hartman, "Venus" 13). The past, present, and future are tied in a way that render this engagement necessary. She centers Black women’s lives in the discourse of the human and makes the assertion that, "nothing could be said about the Negro problem, modernity, global capitalism, police brutality, state killings, and the Anthropocene if it did not take her into account" (Hartman, "Wayward Lives" 347). In doing so, she demonstrates the ways Black women live in a unique position. We do not wholly inhabit Wynter’s demonic ground, but we certainly are laying the foundation for it. W.E.B. Du Bois characterized the World’s best chance at Democracy as coming with the liberation of

the enslaved (Black man). I wonder, what would the liberation of Black Women mean?

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Chapter 2: Black Wo/Man's Burden: Black Characters in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*

The Shining is often acclaimed for its use of Steadicam, eerie tracking shots, effective setting, and star performances. There have been many theories about the movie's actual theme, ranging from a re-telling of Native American genocide to a fake moon landing. One aspect of the film that has not received much critical attention is Kubrick's inclusion and portrayal of Black characters. Using cinematography and mise en scène to analyze a subset of the film's scenes that include Black people, I argue that Kubrick exploits Black characters to exhibit important aspects of the film. Additionally, I point out the way seemingly miniscule decisions about Black representation enact popular racist tropes of Black characters. Lastly, I consider Black feminist theory and practice and attempt to re-watch a scene depicting Black women.

Together, the cinematography and mise en scène in the ice cream scene between Mr. Hallorann and Danny inform the audience of the "Shining." They also convey the Overlook hotel's violent, antagonistic nature. The scene begins with Dick Hallorann and Danny seated in the Overlook Hotel kitchen. This is a significant change to the film's earlier cinematography. Up until this point, the film has been shot with an extra-wide lens with the camera canted, panning, pushing and pulling, moving with the Torrance family as they tour the hotel. As a result of the camera angles, the characters onscreen have felt small, unstable, and insignificant in the overwhelming presence of the hotel. For the first time since the family's introduction, the camera, and thus the viewer, settles in a space within the Overlook.

During this scene, Kubrick's use of mise en scène works with the stationary setting to showcase the room's cold, sterile environment. This runs counter to a kitchen's usual function in American society as a warm, inviting, bustling and lively center of activity. White walls, metal cabinets and appliances, and cool, stark overhead fluorescent lighting compose the kitchen's background. The camera ranges from medium to close-medium shots of the characters. This keeps the background of the kitchen from feeling spatially overwhelming. Yet, the stark industrial-ness of the setting around the characters implies their life is set up in opposition to the materiality of the hotel. The result eschews the usual domestic safety that a kitchen implies. The viewer is reminded that the Overlook is a place a part of but separate from the rest of the world.

Just as the hotel feels closed off from the rest of the world, the room is portrayed as an isolated area. There are no windows into the space. The camera's placement looking into the room at the two characters cuts off any evidence of a door for Dick Hallorann and Danny to escape or for anyone else to interrupt them. Within the room, the only sounds are the character's voices and out of frame sounds from some being not in view of the characters and the viewer. There are no sounds or background music. Aside from the two characters, the only organic objects in the room are the wooden chairs and a table the characters are seated around. Throughout the scene, the table and chairs appear solid and well-used, with the woodgrain on prominent display. The presence of the table and chairs provide an anchor for the characters in the otherwise cold, sterile, industrial kitchen. It seems fitting that amidst the foreboding inorganic-ness of the kitchen, there is this place set aside for these characters to exist.

As the dialogue between Dick Hallorann and Danny begins, the cinematography of the scene juxtaposed with the rest of the film becomes even more distinct. *The Shining* is in many ways a counter-classical movie. However, in this scene, Kubrick follows the character's conversation using a classical shot-reverse-shot. As each character speaks, the camera jumps back and forth from some location at the table near the listening character. The camera angle remains level so that the viewer sees the size difference between the two characters. From this vantage point, Dick Hallorann looks down at Danny and Danny up at him. Although the camera placement is not precisely aligned with where each character is sitting, it is close enough that the viewer feels embodied within the listening character or a location near them. Edgar Morin theorizes that characters on the screen function as a Doppelganger of the spectator through which, "one can enter the film…it gives them an uncanny quality as if these characters were the embodiment simultaneously of what is all-too-familiar and yet all-too-feared in ourselves" (Elsaeesser and Hagener 42). Kubrick's use of the shot-reverse-shot appears to be a perfect enactment of this theory. The diegesis pulls the viewer in and allows them to project their imaginings of how this moment must feel onto the two characters. From this entrance to the world of the film, the uncanniness of the feel of the world is apparent.

The seemingly straightforward cinematography of the shot-reverse-shot portrayal of the scene is dislodged as you begin to consider it along with the mise en scène and dialogue within the scene. From the onset, the viewer is thrown off by the subject matter being discussed, during what should be an innocuous encounter between a friendly older cook and a relatively young child over a bowl of ice cream. Dick Hallorann confides in

Danny that they both possess a psychic ability that his grandmother, who also had the ability, called the "Shining." As they discuss the "Shining" and how Danny uses it, Danny's childish vernacular, "I'm nota 'sposed to," contrasts with his understanding of a kid who lives in his mouth and gives him important visions. Dick Hallorann's intent observation while Danny describes Tony and the things he tells him shows that they are not childish imaginings. Hallorann goes on to press him to think "real hard" on what Tony has told him about this place. Danny has the prescience to ask Mr. Hallorann if he fears the hotel, and most importantly, if he is scared of Room 237. During the scene, the roles have reversed. Even Danny's posture mimics that of Dick Hallorann, his hands clasped in front of his body and his brow furrowed. What began as a kindly old cook questioning and preparing a psychic young boy for the dangers of the Overlook, is now the boy interrogating the wizened man.

The mise en scène and cinematography continue to illustrate Danny's startling maturity. Although the bowl of ice cream is present on the table, the viewer never actually sees Danny eat from it. Discontinuities in the scene destabilize the viewer's understanding of age, time, and identity. Some frames show Danny with chocolate residue around his mouth, while others do not. Danny's inability to eat ice cream on the screen appears to suggest his inability to enjoy popular childhood pleasures. This is a theme that repeats itself in many different portions of the film. Additionally, mise en scène and cinematography work together to reveal the character of the other being in the scene – the Overlook Hotel.

Although the shot-reverse-shot shooting of the conversation is nearly mirrored for each character, as Dick Hallorann speaks about “Shining” and asks Danny about his “Shining”, he has a substantial amount of space between the top of his head and the top of the frame. In fact, the white wall behind him and the reflection of the fluorescent light off his bald head make his “Shine" visible. As he asks Danny, “how long have you been able to do it?” The camera jumps back from the medium to medium close shot that has been used to follow the conversation thus far. It moves into a further out angle, which shows both characters in a two-shot looking at each other, and the kitchen behind Danny as well. The perspective change reminds the viewer where this conversation is happening. The Overlook itself is listening. When Danny explains that Tony told him not to talk about his ability, the camera zooms into a tighter medium shot and pushes Danny’s head outside of the top of the frame. He is literally wound uptight, and unable to speak. The camera opens up on Danny as Dick Hallorann coaxes him into opening up about his gift. By the time Tony is being described, Danny and Dick Hallorann’s shots are mirrored exactly again.

As the reversal of roles mentioned above takes place, the camera zooms back out into a two-shot, this one from a location at the table the viewer has not occupied before. The result of the move is two-fold. It shows the viewer how doubly Danny and Dick Hallorann are postured, and that Dick Hallorann’s reassurances that he is not scared of the hotel appear uncomfortable and dishonest. To emphasize his dishonesty and the very real danger that Danny is in, the Overlook is present in the background. Outside of each character’s view, nine knives point straight at Danny’s head. The scene grows more

foreboding while Dick Hallorann implores Danny to stay away from Room 237. Although Dick still has space between his head and the top of the frame, from this new angle the viewer sees that the white walls, which appeared to be a part of his “Shine,” are actually covered with red, white, and blue posters reminiscent of the American Flag. Even more disturbing, his head is now leaned down and the frame, and the Overlook, are crowding him as well. The frames speed up with the conversation between Dick Hallorann and Danny as they discuss the dangers of the hotel. As the scene comes to a close, the calm that the friendly old cook brought to the conversation is replaced with an impending sense of dread.

Throughout the scene, Kubrick’s use of mise en scène and cinematography combine elements of classical Hollywood style and Kubrick’s own counter classical approach to further unsettle the viewer as they are introduced to the Overlook Hotel. Numerous cinematic elements unsettle the seemingly straightforward shot-reverse-shot. Hallorann and Danny's troubling dialogue, the discontinuities within the frame, the placement and body language of the characters, disembodied sounds that seem to be right off camera but are never seen, and the overwhelmingly dangerous presence of the Overlook itself. Just as the shot of the kitchen provides no way out for Danny and Dick Hallorann, the viewer finishes the scene stuck with the inevitability of violence.

Dick Hallorann does not appear in the film again until its third act. When Jack Torrance becomes possessed by the Overlook hotel’s evil spirits and tries to kill Danny and Wendy, Danny uses telepathy to call out to Hallorann. The scene brings the viewer into Hallorann’s vacation home in Florida, where he is lying in bed watching a weather

report about Colorado. The room is setup like a mirror. One side holds the television set, representing the Torrances in Colorado, and the other contains Dick Hallorann. Each side of the room is symmetrical. On the side of the room opposite Dick Hallorann, two lamps sit on either side of a television set. Next to each lamp is a stack of records. The covers are mostly obscured by the mattress. Hallorann's side of the room mirrors the television side with nightstands holding two lamps and indecipherable books on either side of the bed. The bedroom walls are completely bare aside from two pictures on opposite sides of the room, one above the television and one above the bed. Throughout the scene, Kubrick's use of mise en scène, reveals nothing about Hallorann as a character. There are no family pictures, knick-knacks, or personal belongings in the background. Even Hallorann's records, which tend to give insight into a character's musical taste and some aspects of their temperament, are concealed. The revealing, framed images of Black women are the only decorations. The coldness of the bedroom calls to mind the earlier sterility of the Overlook's kitchen. The bedroom is full of warm colors. There are peach walls, a wooden bedframe, television stand and green sheets. But, its lack of personality and content makes it feel lifeless. Similarly to the earlier scene in the kitchen, Kubrick employs the mise en scène to empty the room of the security, safety, and personality you would normally expect to find in a bedroom.

The cinematography of the scene reemphasizes the relationship between what is happening with the Torrance family in Colorado and Dick Hallorann's lack of richness as a character. The scene begins by setting up a One-Point Horizon of the television and slowly zooming out along the z-axis. The result is that the viewer's eyes are pulled to and

held at the deepest part of the frame, Hallorann's television screen. Hallorann lies in the supine position, his body bisected by the frame's vertical midline. As the weatherman describes the blizzard conditions and inaccessibility of Colorado – closed airports, stranded passengers, blocked roadways and frozen tracks, the camera jumps at a 150-degree angle to a choke of Dick Hallorann, completely engrossed by the report on Colorado. The camera slowly zooms out, this time using a one-point perspective to focus the viewer's gaze on Dick Hallorann. The camera makes a quick 150-degree jump back to the television set as the weatherman begins discussing the rising temperatures in Miami, and then back to a slightly further than medium shot of Hallorann, still calm and engrossed in the weather report. Sudden, eerie, high-pitched, almost piercing music begins to play as the camera does a long, slow zoom into Dick Hallorann's face. This is a non-diegetic sound that builds suspense as the scene continues. The music overlaying the scene grows louder as the camera zooms closer to Hallorann's face and the weatherman's voice fades quieter. Like the viewer, Hallorann is no longer focusing on the television.

Altogether, the zoom into Dick Hallorann's face lasts almost one-minute. It is the longest, slowest zoom Kubrick uses in the entire film. Here the cinematography and mise en scène create an overwhelming amount of tension and apprehension. As the camera moves in on his face and the music grows louder, Hallorann's eyes open wide and his mouth falls opens bit-by-bit. His jaw and face begin shaking. A soundless, petrified gasp emits from his mouth. Again, the mise en scène depicts the horror of Dick Hallorann's premonition about the evil occurring at the Overlook Hotel. By positioning Hallorann lying on his back, slack-jawed, with wide, glazed eyes staring at some unknowable terror,

caught in the throes of his vision, Kubrick forewarns the violence that is coming for the cook. The camera zooms all the way into such a close choke that all that is visible of Hallorann's face are his eyes, nose, and mouth. The image resembles that of a man taking his last breaths.

Following this is a scene of Danny, also in bed frothing and shaking in response to the overwhelming wickedness of the Overlook. Dick Hallorann and Danny appear to be experiencing a simultaneous premonition. Kubrick could have directed their scenes to be perfect parallels. However, there are slight differences between the mise en scène and cinematography that foreshadow each character's fate at the end of the film. Up to this point in the movie, Danny is the only character that has been subjected to physical violence by Jack and the Overlook hotel. Additionally, because of his lack of control over his "Shine," his young age and his presence at the hotel, Danny would seem to be the character most susceptible to fall victim to its violence. The piercing, sinister music is still playing, and the camera zooms in on Danny, but the extent of the zoom is different from Dick Hallorann's in the earlier scene. Rather than the camera moving from a medium shot to an extreme choke, the camera goes from a medium close-up shot to a close shot before the film cuts to another frame. Additionally, Danny's position in bed is different than Hallorann's as well. Instead of lying on his back, Danny is seated in bed. These two changes illustrate that Danny is in fact, less at risk of the Overlook's malevolence than Dick Hallorann.

Unfazed by the very real danger of the Overlook hotel and the impassable weather, Hallorann goes to extraordinary lengths to rescue the Torrance family. He buys

a last-minute plane ticket, rents a car, finds a SnowCat, and makes it to the secluded hotel in blizzard conditions. Of course, his efforts are for naught. Jack Torrance murders Hallorann with an ax to the chest soon after he steps into the Overlook's lobby. Kubrick's ending for Dick Hallorann is a major departure from Stephen King's novel's ending. In the original version, Dick Hallorann reaches the Overlook and manages to rescue Wendy and Danny right before the Overlook explodes, killing Jack. Without the above cinematographic and theatrical clues, Hallorann's fate is completely unexpected. Even with these clues, the question remains: why did Kubrick choose to construct a violent end for Dick Hallorann's character? By considering the Horror genre's treatment of Black characters during the 1980s, in addition to the way Kubrick directed Dick Hallorann's character, I argue that his murder is not a simple act of creative license. Instead, it is emblematic of a larger genre style and the way American society viewed Black character's role in cinema at the time.

Despite being the major supporting character in *The Shining*, Dick Hallorann's presence in the movie functions only to serve, teach, comfort and attempt to save the white Torrance family. Hallorann's entire persona is built for the benefit of the white characters he is in proximity to. For example, although Hallorann is the person who explains "Shining" to Danny and is gifted and experienced enough to recognize the strength of Danny's ability and the danger the hotel poses to him, Hallorann is unable to utilize his gift to prevent himself from being murdered. Before arriving at the hotel and while Jack stalks him, Hallorann does not have any prescience about his own demise. His abilities are only useful while they are functioning to aid the white characters.

Filmmaker Spike Lee popularized the term "Magical Negro" to describe this common archetype in white cinema. Although Magical Negro is a contemporary term and often applied to more modern films, Dick Hallorann's character in *The Shining* seems to fit the stereotype. In his essay "Cinethetic Racism: White Redemption and Black Stereotypes in 'Magical Negro' Films" Matthew Hughey describes the Magical Negro as:

> a stock character that often appears as a lower class, uneducated black person who possesses supernatural or magical powers. These powers are used to save and transform disheveled, uncultured, lost, or broken Whites (almost exclusively White men) into competent, successful, and content people within the context of the American myth of redemption and salvation. (544)

Hughey elaborates that these relationships are "interracial cooperation between broken whites and Magical Negroes with exceptionally safe and happy attributes" (556). Kubrick seems to envision Dick Hallorann as this sort of unsophisticated, humble cook. In an interview with Michel Ciment, Kubrick describes Hallorann as "simple," "rustic," "folksy," and praises the way the character describes telepathy in an unscientific way with a certain naivety. Despite Hallorann's psychic ability, one that allowed him to have entire telepathic conversations with his grandmother, he is not portrayed as an authority on the "Shine" or a powerful telepath in his own right.

Along with the film using Hallorann as the Magical Negro, it also uses his character as a sacrificial lamb for the Torrance family. Hallorann's identity outside of his profession serving patrons of the Overlook and the Torrance family is nonexistent. He does not appear to have any family. In fact, he only mentions his grandmother to reassure

Danny that his "Shine" is a gift. His home is impersonal and bare and there are no indications that Hallorann has a partner or close friends. As the scenes in the kitchen and at Hallorann's home show, his only purpose in the film is to provide Danny with unwavering support. Hallorann is so devoted to Danny that he is willing to cut his vacation time short and go to extreme lengths to make it to the Overlook to save the boy, rather than notify local Colorado authorities or the Overlook's owners.

The cinematography and mise en scène within Hallorann's home are a foreshadowing that Dick Hallorann cannot and will not escape the violent tension that is escalating in the Overlook hotel. Robin Means Coleman asserts that in the 1980s Horror films that were not set in urban or city areas were near exclusively white. When Black characters were included, it was in support of white characters, and their relation to white characters was often exhibited by dying a horrific death on the white character's behalf (151). Means Coleman describes Hallorann's character as, "the defining (re)turn toward the self-sacrificing Black character – a character who dies in the course of saving Whiteness" (151). By invoking Dick Hallorann as the "self-sacrificing" Black character, Kubrick was able to elicit the shock value of the ghastly murder that the Horror genre is known for while still privileging Whiteness. *The Shining* is one of many Horror films where the Black character dies first. For a Black character in a Horror film, the lurking violence is inevitable for them.

Aside from Dick Hallorann, *The Shining* includes one other Black character, a store clerk who lends Hallorann the SnowCat for his trip to the Overlook. While Black men are included in the film, there is not a single Black woman character. The only

depiction of Black women is the two posters displayed in Hallorann's bedroom. As I mentioned earlier, the camera moves in an unhurried zoom outward. While it moves, each woman's body is made visible to the viewer. Both women are near-naked, posed on a plain colored background. In a first viewing of the film, the posters' presence felt like it embodied the woman image, man bearer dichotomy Laura Mulvey discusses in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." The Black women depicted in the poster are literally "looked at and displayed." The picture frame bounds their bodies. Their bodies display is deliberate in time with the camera's unhurried movement out along the z-axis. One at a time, the pace of the zoom displays each body part. The viewer has more than enough time to look and know each part. By the time the camera has zoomed out far enough to reveal each poster in full, the horizon is so deep that the women's faces are not focused and appear blurry.

The inclusion of the posters was so random, objectifying and explicit that they drew my eyes immediately. Mulvey describes women in film as a "…visual presence against the development of a storyline, [that] freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation" (62). She argues that for women characters to not break the narrative of the film, they must perform as an erotic object for the spectator and the male characters. In the bedroom scene, the viewer's gaze and the male character's gaze are not melded. Instead, Hallorann's attention remains focused on the television screen and his premonition while the erotic images catch the viewer's gaze.

The tension of this moment makes the posters inclusion even more jarring. Upon re-watching the scene, I began to think about what it meant for two Black women's

depictions to be included in this film in this way. Kubrick did not offer any context about his decision to add the posters to the mise en scène. Additionally, the women in the posters were not listed in the credits. The issue of Black women receiving credit and compensation for their likeness is of course a considerable and longstanding topic in many industries. A noteworthy aspect of Kubrick's choice to reproduce the women's images without crediting them is that one of the models, Azizi Johari, was the June 1975 Playboy of the Month. Regardless of Azizi Jahari's renown as a model and actress, the film is able to obfuscate her presence in *The Shining*. The problematic insertion of the two women into the film has not been discussed by academic or cinematic sources. Also, thirty years later the models depicted have not received any compensation. The film exploits Black women, similar to how it exploited Dick Hallorann's character as both a Magical Negro and sacrificial lamb.

Until this point in the film, only white women appear onscreen. Moreover, Kubrick's choice of sexualized Black posters sets up a dichotomy between Black and white women. It is important to note the setting that includes these posters. The bedroom is the lone place Black women are permitted to exist in the film. Moreover, they are segregated to the Black man's bedroom. In *The Shining* Black women's difference is racially and sexually marked. Her likeness is only permitted in a space that is exclusively Black. Excess sexuality becomes attached to Black women's representation. In this way, the Black women's inclusion in the film becomes what Janelle Hobson calls, "a signifier for blackness that shapes a more palatable representation of whiteness" (46). When I juxtapose the film's other naked display, the spirit Woman in Room 237 the Black

women's images are even more charged. The Black women are confined by the frame, exposed to every look. The Woman in Room 237 is free to look and touch back. It is not lost on me that the Woman in Room 237 committed suicide because of being heartbroken over a man. Yet, she still exhibits some measure of agency. Once again, Kubrick manages to re-enact racial stereotypes of Black people. Black women characters are absent from the narrative, but the framed posters still manage to bring the Jezebel into the film.

The Shining's handling of Black women is troubling. Erasure of Black women characters is not enough for Kubrick, he also enacts harmful racial tropes. This brings me to Black feminist film theory and practice. bell hooks asserts that in the absence of independent Black cinema, Black viewers responded to white supremacist looking relations with an "oppositional gaze." She continues describing this gaze as:

> Black looks, as they were constituted in the context of social movements for racial uplift, were interrogating gazes. We laughed at television shows like Our Gang and Amos 'n' Andy, at these white representations of blackness, but we also looked at them critically. Before racial integration, black viewers of movies and television experienced visual pleasure in a context where looking was also about contestation and confrontation. (hooks 117)

hooks suggests that Black viewing combines pleasure and using critical, confrontational gazes. Critical Black female spectators in particular "construct a theory of looking relations where cinematic visual delight is the pleasure of interrogation" (126). I wonder how interrogation and defiance may be applied to these women? What do we do with this

damaging appendment of Black women to this film? How do we combat the horror of the way white films depict (or do not depict) Black women? Is there a way we can read any agency for these women? I watched the bedroom scene over and over. Each time paying close attention to the women in the frames.

The women's images hang on opposite sides of the room. The bottom of the frames fall right above the one-point horizon Kubrick draws your eyes to. They float, above the television set, Dick Hallorann and maybe even the viewer's gaze. Their expressions are indecipherable. I wonder what they were thinking when those pictures were taken? Their indistinct faces lend them an air of unknowability. The viewer may look at their body, but they will never know their interiority. Although their likeness is included here, the gaze can never go beyond the flatness of the image. Their corporeality is not present. They cannot be touched, demeaned or berated by an irate director. Most importantly, they are placed on a perfect parallel to each other. Here, they have the space and ability to share looks with one another, a "space of agency…wherein [they] can both interrogate the gaze of the Other but also look back, and at one another, naming what we see." I wonder what they say.

Although the white Torrance family are the main characters in the movie and Black characters are relegated to one supporting role, Kubrick employs Blackness to do an extraordinary amount of labor on behalf of Whiteness. Moreover, his representation of Blackness is at its expense. When you consider the way narrative, mise en scène and cinematography depict Blackness in *The Shining*, there is a devastating amount of

violent, anti-Blackness. However, if we do watch, I hope it is with the insistence that our look will “change reality.”

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Chapter 3: Ad mutationem: Homo Narrans and Autopoietic in *An Unkindness of Ghosts*

Sylvia Wynter's texts reveal the inadequacies of our current Western-epistemic conception of the human. She posits that our past and current societal violences are the result of a partial epistemological transformation and the overrepresentation of "Man" as the human. Her theories of Homo-Narrans and the Autopoietic Turn/Overturn provide a framework for completing this incomplete transformation by reimagining what it means to be human. In her essay "Novel and History, Plot and Plantation," Wynter ties Lucien Goldmann's hypothesis that the novel form arises as a product of, and one in opposition to, the market economy to the plantation and the small plots of land enslaved people tended to sustain themselves. Sometimes, the yield from these plots could be sold for money, which could be used toward seeking freedom. Wynter utilizes Goldmann's reading of the novel as a rupture between the hero and the market as one that enables the novel to exist outside of the mythic nature of history. She proposes that the plot, like the novel within history, is a little autonomous zone embedded in the plantation where enslaved people can survive and share their own secret recreated tales of resistance (Wynter, "Novel and History" 95-102). In particular, her theories appeal for the Humanities to fulfill an integral role in imagining *being* human anew. Wynter suggests that this imagining will require us to think outside of our current cultural ontological codes. Here, the novel is a medium of possibility. Its form can reach the conceptual crevices and excesses that lie beyond our epistemic boundaries. While these sorts of

literary fiction are not enough to wholly catalyze the rupture that will complete the transformative mutation, I assert that they lay the grounds to usher in that rupture.

An Unkindness of Ghosts, by Rivers Solomon, is a novel set sometime in the future of an alternate Earth. In the novel, the protagonists resist a racialized, oppressive society. As I will illustrate later in this paper, *An Unkindness of Ghosts* portrays aspects of the historical narrative of the Middle Passage, enslavement and the plantation. Additionally, the work unsettles traditional conceptions of time and space, centers those who are outside of our epistemically bounded Man, recognizes and enacts modes of being a hybrid human, and illustrates the importance of language (both poetic and scientific). For that reason, I chose to read the novel as an instantiation of Wynter's Homo Narrans and Autopoietic. In doing so, I hope to depict the ending of the novel as a literary representation of the mutation that is essential to making our World anew.

My analysis of *An Unkindness of Ghosts* centers on Wynter's theorization of the Western conception and overrepresentation of Man. Wynter's work asserts that contemporary culturally-specific descriptive statements define our consideration of who counts as a full, or whole, human (Wynter, "The Ceremony Found" 196). She traces the beginnings of a Western-centric theory of Man back to the post-medieval Early Modern period. Christian European beliefs of God and theology as the center of the universe were the basis for this first representation of Man. Later, with the beginning of the Renaissance period and continuing advancements in science, education, literature and art, the theory of Man began to transform into secularized terms. Continued scientific development, in

particular the Darwinian theory of Evolution, precipitated the second transformation of Man that is the modern Western understanding of the human.

Part of the issue of these definitions of Man is that the categorizations give rise to a hegemonic difference. Defining Man as moral (Christian) Man and rational Man also denotes an immoral Man and irrational (savage) Man. Contact with the New World, and an exposure to different culturally-specific ways of knowing and being, led to increased classification and subordination for the "irrational Human Others." These judgements formed the first iteration towards the modern racial delimiters (Wynter, "TCF 187). Sylvia Wynter argues that:

> ...it was this discourse, beginning with its emancipatory and world transformative, secularizing Renaissance origins that had at the same time also given rise to what I have earlier identified as the first ratiocentric...form of what was later to become the full-fledged biocentric issue of ‘race.’ (Wynter, "TCF 187)

She goes on, "this first formation had been effected by Renaissance Civic-humanism’s discursive negation of our *co*-humanity as a species on the basis of its 'reasons-of-state'..." (Wynter, "TCF" 187; emphasis added). The Darwinian rupture transformed the second iteration of Man and ushered in the biocentric (natural) Line/Divide.

Man was classified as the naturally selected (European) and the naturally dysselected (Black, native, etc.) (Wynter, "TCF" 187). Wynter calls these culturally specific schemas of the human “genres” of Man. However, the modern theory of Man applies these Western-specific notions as the totality of being human. Through this

"overrepresentation" of "Man" as human, Man becomes white, male, bourgeois, and heterosexual. Anyone who is not contained by those descriptive statements becomes "Other." In her article "Homo Narrans and the Science of the Word," Bedour Alagraa describes the violence that this overrepresentation causes, "the violence…is in its foreclosure of a nonhierarchical referent 'we' in favor of $Man_{2/1}$ and nothing else" (165). Alagraa continues and explains that these categorizations expanded to the creation of our racialized and colonized socioeconomic systems by marking, "a boundary that inscribed Man_2 as 'breadwinning' and Man's other as laboring" (165). The foundation of the world's violent, hierarchical systems is rooted in the placement of Blackness and Other outside of the bounds of Man.

Wynter argues that the heart of this misconception lies in an over-reliance on our biological characteristics as an explanation for what makes us human. Instead, she explores Frantz Fanon's description of the lived experience of being Black as a socially constructed phenomenon that is encoded as a transcultural "common reality" (Wynter, "Toward the Sociogenic Principle" 48). She extends and adapts Fanon's concept to theorize the sociogenetic principle, which is that we all have a culturally prescribed sense of self (Wynter, "TSP" 47-48). Additionally, this sense of self is predefined by the language we use, the "thousand details, anecdotes and stories" specific to a particular viewpoint and perspective and imprinted by institutions and society. Although we are born as biological humans, we cannot experience ourselves as humans without the mediation of socialization that is determined by the inventions of our culture. In this way, the ways we experience being ourselves is in relation to the way we interact with others

based within the constructed societal schemas that are in place. The result is that we fictively construct and performatively enact ourselves as *who* we are based on the origin stories and myths that tell the World who we are (Wynter, "TCF" 196). Who we are becomes a function of the language our culture imposes onto us. Since the language of Man is based on binary characteristics, it cannot realize humans in our many hybrid forms and our ultimate fullness.

Wynter combines as praxis Frantz Fanon's sociogenetic conception of who-we-are as humans with Aimé Césaire's proposal for a new and hybrid "science of the Word" to put forth the "Autopoietic Turn/Overturn". She advances Césaire's piece "Poetry and Knowledge" to propose that the science of the Word redefines "science" as a theory and praxis that stretches beyond the limits of the natural sciences. Instead it is reconceived as the "study of nature" based in the law of the Word (Wynter, "TCF" 209-210). Césaire writes that there exists a space from which, "life and death, the real and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, high and low, cease to be perceived contradictorily" (Césaire xlvii). He continues and says the way the poet approaches the poem is to experience the totality of everything (Césaire xlvii). Wynter theorizes that a science grounded in the determinative perspective of the Word transgresses our "normally unbreachable… Line/Divide between…the physical and biological sciences…the disciplines of the Humanities and the Social Sciences" (Wynter, "TCF" 210). She recognizes the study of the word/study of nature relates to Fanon's study of sociogeny/ontogeny (the biocentric). Practicing Césaire's study of nature that is

based in the Word, the Word being Fanon's conception of the experience of being human, provides an opening for humans to reauthor ourselves.

Wynter offers the process of the "autopoiesis" to reenact Humanism's conceptions of Man through narration. Since the origin stories we tell about ourselves tell us and the World who we are, then by narrating new origin stories of ourselves, each time encoding the referent We (the fullness of humanity), we are able to performatively enact ourselves to be the referent We (Wynter, "TCF" 213-214). Bedour Alagraa describes this self-authorship as, "the process of creating oneself endlessly" (167). Since the language of Man is not able to convey what it is like to be conscious outside of the terms of each culture-specific order, we must find a new language that is beyond the physical or purely biological, and at the hybrid level of ontogenetic/sociogenetic modes of existence. This requires a commitment to centering those of us who inhabit the liminal categories that our current binarity modes of being exclude. The necessity of conceiving a language that centers the most hybrid of us, calls to mind Wynter's theorization of the "demonic." For in the "'real but long unnoticed'" places where these people reside are "new ways of being" (McKittrick Ch. 5).

The possibility for truth from within these places of differences, or the demonic, is explored further in Sylvia Wynter's "Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's Woman." The article examines absent meanings to characterize the demonic ground where Caliban's (Black) Women resides. Wynter first considers Black women's relationship to feminism by analyzing Caribbean women writers'/critics' Sameness and Difference within the field. While the Caribbean women

share gender and class with their European and Euro American counterparts, the variable of race "strongly demarcates the situation of the Caribbean women intelligentsia, whether Black or White, from that of their Western/Euro American counterparts" (Wynter, "Beyond Miranda's Meanings" 356). Throughout the article, Wynter argues that inserting race into the understanding of numerous "isms" dislodges the modern episteme of knowledge and sets the preliminary ground for a post-modern understanding of the human.

Wynter sets the foundation of this new ground by analyzing Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as the foundation for modern Western episteme. This modern ground is inhabited by homo economics, the modern genre of Man who was created when secular conceptions of man developed following the European Enlightenment (Wynter, "BMM" 357). In this article, Wynter describes the incomplete mutation of Man in relation to the gender binary division of the time:

> …ostensible difference in 'natural' substance which, for the first time in history was no longer primarily encoded in the male/female gender division as it had been…but now in the cultural-physiognomic variations between the dominant expanding European civilization and the non-Western peoples that…it would now stigmatize as natives. (Wynter, "BMM" 358)

By examining the relationship between the Native (Negro) character, Caliban, to the differently gendered woman character, Miranda, Wynter exhibits that "sex-gender attributes are no longer the primary index of 'deferent' difference" (Wynter, "BMM"

358). Therefore, there is a new category of the human. There is Man (and his woman, Miranda), and the subordinated native, or Other (and his woman).

However, in the play the Native woman is never named. Logically, she must exist, as Caliban exists and he must have a mother, as well as a differently gendered Other. Yet, Caliban's woman is disappeared by the limits of the current episteme. Wynter asserts that this silenced and missing Other woman, is from the same paradoxical Sameness and Difference discourse with which Black American women and the 'native' Caribbean intelligentsia engage with feminism and womanism ("BMM" 363). This draws attention to:

> the insufficiency of all existing theoretical interpretive models both to 'voice' the hitherto silenced ground of the experience of 'native' Caribbean women and Black American women as the ground of Caliban's woman, and to de-code the system of meanings of that other discourse, which has imposed this mode of silence for some five centuries. (Wynter, "BMM" 363)

In other words, the code for this woman lies outside of our current popular episteme, and outside of traditional constructs of femininity. Operating within this other terrain, which does not include the limitations of the current epistemic conception of Man, will form the basis for the next understanding of human life. Rivers Solomon's work stretches the liminal category which the new language of the Human must include. Solomon's characters inhabit the terrain outside of our current ontological notions of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability.

The power in Rivers Solomon's *An Unkindness of Ghosts,* is that they transcribe modernity's violent, racial-colonial structures and write the ending anew. As Nnedi Okorafor concludes in her novel *Who Fears Death,* "something must be written before it can be rewritten" (415). And so, Solomon recreates many of the horrors of the Middle Passage and the plantation and transports those horrors to outer space aboard a ship called *Matilda* that holds the only known surviving humans. Much like our lived version of Modernity, the founding members of the ship have died, and it floats through outer space toward a long-awaited Promise Land.

Dionne Brand describes the location where Africans were forced into the transatlantic slave trade, called the Door of No Return, as a "tear in the world" and a "...physical rupture, a rupture of geography" (Brand Location 51). Here, I consider Brand's description as a geographical instantiation of Wynter's Copernican and Darwinian ruptures that produced the representations of Man. Solomon's choice of setting for *An Unkindness of Ghosts* literalizes this rupture by placing the narrative outside of our modern world. The creation of Man and the subsequent tearing of the Earth pushes the characters of the novel into outer space.

Solomon's choice of setting for *An Unkindness of Ghosts* comes across as an example of poetic remakings of Wynter's autopoiesis. *Matilda* is a generational ship that contains aspects of the slave ship which carried captive Africans along the transatlantic slave trade, and the plantation. There are references to a "great flood," which washes X deck away. The memory of this flood is almost completely missing from the narrative and suggests a connection to the fate of captive Africans who drowned during their

forced migration across the Atlantic Ocean. Also, the depiction of *Matilda* as a ship organized vertically and horizontally with suffering, dehydration, starving, and violence inflicted on the racialized bodies of the people who are kept captive there seems to be a reference to the holds of slave vessels of the Middle Passage.

The transformation of people into commodity begins quickly. Shortly after a disaster aboard the ship a scientist seeks to use an electrical current to reanimate the corpses of Lower Deck people, called "Tarlanders," into "perfectly obedient workers" who could "hoe fields effectively [with n]o productivity loss" (Solomon Ch. 2). Although the idea is rejected by the other Upper deck survivors, the scientist's speech is preserved in the ships' archive. Tarlanders are labelled as "spiritless, demonic, and beasts" (Solomon Ch. 2). Tarlanders are subjugated as laborer Others by the "Word." From here, the novel's replication of chattel slavery plantations begins.

Aboard the *Matilda* the different floors of the ship also represent the Line/Divide of the naturally selected and naturally dysselected of Wynter's theory of the second iteration of Man. Each level corresponds to a racialized population of people. The lower floors being closer to Blackness and the upper to Whiteness. Just as in our current structures the character's race inscribes their social and economic status. Solomon does not belabor the social and economic stratifications of the ship, but they provide enough detail for the reader to interpret the parallels to plantations. The Lower Deckers are the laborers – they work the fields which feed the entire population of *Matilda*. Additionally, a group of Lower Deck Women from Y deck tend to Baby Sun, the radioactive reactor that controls electricity, heat, provides light for the crops to grow and controls day/night

cycles on *Matilda.* The Upper Decks are inhabited by the government administrators, high-ranking military officers, doctors, and their families. Middle Deckers are everyone in-between, such as lower-ranking military members and tradespeople. Access to resources, mobility, education, leisure, and agency increases as you ascend the floors. Additionally, characters that inhabit lower floors have zero protections against physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and surveillance by other members of the ship. The guards' entire purpose seems to be policing the Lower Deck people. For members of the Lower Deck, moments outside of labor are eked out in the privacy of their bunks, or at risk to their physical and emotional well-being. Solomon recreates many of the historical accounts of plantations within the metal decks of the *Matilda*.

The reformulation of *Matilda* as slave vessel and plantation collapses linear, progressive conceptions of Western time and eschews absolute geographical characteristics such as scale and place. Together, these two points are a reauthoring of spacetime. The transatlantic slave trade began during the second half of the sixteenth century and continued until the nineteenth century. These forced migrations began from many regions on the African continent such as the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana), the Bight of Benin, and West-Central Africa (Kongo and Angola) and more sporadic places, like Madagascar (Smallwood Intro). Solomon's *Matilda* collapses these disparate locations and times into one single spaceship.

I do not mean to suggest that this collapsing of time and space is analogous to an actual representation of the varied regions, cultures, and communities that enslavement impacted. Nor do I mean to erase the evolving aims and distinct manners of being and

knowing, on the part of the enslaved and the enslavers, that occurred throughout the transatlantic slave trade and chattel slavery's existence. Rather, I mean to suggest that the usefulness of the novel genre is that it facilitates the possibility to open these events up and reconfigure them in unconventional ways. This merging of the Middle Passage and chattel enslavement makes the relationship between the present and the past, which Saidiya Hartman describes as "disparate temporalities of unfreedom," visible (763). The ability to interweave the narratives of the horrors, violence, dispossession and domination of the Middle Passage and enslavement is one of the openings the novel allows. The form is amenable for the telling and overlaying of a non-linear, geographically connected spacetime that reveals the linkages that theory tells us are present. By unveiling the connections between the present and past, here and there, Solomon illustrates the way Black people have always created and existed within alternate, "subaltern spatialities" (McKittrick Ch. 1). Within these interconnected realms there is space for intergenerational collective memory, and the stories that pass on knowledge. Aster recounts a story Ainy shares as she shows her a picture from before *Matilda* departed Earth. She says, "'this is a picture of the world that existed before this world', Ainy had said. 'Like X deck, something came and took it 'way. But we remember. We remember. We must try to remember even that which has been forgotten'" (Solomon Ch. 5). This excerpt reminds me of the period before the plantation-plot dichotomy. Wynter shares this was a time before the "'reduction of Man to Labour, and of Nature to Land'" (Wynter, "NAH" 99). While this time before modern Man was still populated by the incomplete moral Man and his Other, the memory of this before-time illustrates that the

current-time is alterable. Through the novel, Solomon is able to destabilize our traditional conceptions of space and time to share the origin stories that Wynter says are integral to fabricating a new human.

The spaceship-slave ship-plantation imagining also illuminates the paradoxical relationship between water and the African diaspora. This relationship can be traced from the crossing of the Atlantic Ocean during the Middle Passage, through the physical representations of freedom and enslavement in the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers, along numerous devastating natural disasters, environmental vulnerability and continued displacements and migrations across the Mediterranean happening today. Sometimes water brings life or delivers enslaved/imperiled Black people to freedom, and others it is weaponized or diverted to inflict devastating damage to Black communities. Anissa Janine Wardi uses water as a framework to reveal that "the confluence of death, loss, migration, and water is endemic to African American culture" (3). She goes on to suggest that in African American cultural history "bodies of water are lieux de mémoire, embodied sites where memory and history converge" (Wardi 6). Solomon's choice of a ship travelling through space couples it with the embodied, historical instances of water, while opening it to the creative possibilities of a domain that is not yet wholly inscribed by Western episteme. The reformulation of the slave ship and plantation as spaceship is a restructuring of the material and conceptual understandings of those sites. These slippages reveal the gaps in Western knowledge. Returning to the alternate spacetime above, *An Unkindness of Ghosts* seems to travel within what Christina Sharpe calls, "trans*Atlantic time… an oceanic time that does not pass, a time in which the past and

present verge" (128). Bringing the slave ship into outer space releases it from the Western, concrete conceptions of geography and temporality and allows for a "fluid, shifting, and indeterminate" depiction of spacetime that the Black characters use to resist hegemonic domination throughout the novel.

Aboard *Matilda,* Modes of Sociogeny socialize Black and white characters. These relations necessitate the presence of Black characters' defects to create white characters' fullness. Proximity to Whiteness is dependent on what level of the ship they are on and their ability to master that level's descriptive codes. The novel's main character, Aster, is Black, gendered outside of our contemporary descriptive codes, and a Lower Decker who is known as an intelligent and talented medical professional. Her skill as a healer allows her to work with the Surgeon who is able to give her access to higher decks. Among the Lower Deck her abilities are renown. Her mastery of Upper Deck medicine combined with her occasional proximity to Whiteness set her apart from the other Lower Deckers. Often, this difference is advantageous and other characters are willing to aid her or provide her with gifts for the technology and healing she provides. However, this difference also impacts the way her amount of Blackness is perceived by other Lower Deckers. In one scene, her sister-friend Giselle questions if she would truly be willing to destroy *Matilda*:

> "Sometimes I don't think you're any different from one of them . . . how you talk. How you strut about this ship like some sort of god—and why? Lots of us is doctors and healers down here, and we managed it without help from the

Surgeon. You ain't special just cause you got all your stupid passes." (Solomon Ch. 3)

Dionne Brand theorizes this trade-off between Whiteness and Blackness as, "this duality was fought every day…One had the sense that some being had to be erased and some being had to be cultivated" (Ch. 1). Solomon's and Brand's quotes bring to the forefront the inability of the binary description of Man to encompass the fullness of someone's expression. In order to grow closer to Whiteness you must also be further from Blackness.

Despite her ability and connections, Aster is still dispensable. Throughout the novel, she endures abuse from white male and female characters, ranging from low-ranking guards to the Sovereign. As Frantz Fanon discovered during his trip to France, the historical-racial schema of Matilda pre-defines Aster as lesser. Regardless of the caste or profession of the white characters she encounters, and in spite of the value she should have to the ship as one of the preeminent healers, her Blackness renders her disposable.

The character Cassidy Ludnecki also provides an illuminating case study on the way Solomon recreates descriptive codes in the novel. As in current conceptions of Humanism, these codes function similarly to a matrix and reify oppressive structures. Each instantiation of difference shifts the cultivation of the character's Whiteness. Although Cassidy's race is not explicitly given, he is described as light brown (non-white). Cassidy is a Lower Decker from the R-floor. His dream was always to be a doctor, but because of the level he lives on, it is not permitted. When a mid-decker dies, Cassidy assumes his identity and joins Theo's medical course. Nothing about Cassidy's

inherent attributes change, but his proximity to the codes of Whiteness change and thus, his opportunity. It is important to note that the Surgeon's neurophysiology class is only open to Middle and Upper Deck Men. Aster's negation of the Upper Deck's descriptive codes mean she is doubly barred from participating. In this way Solomon illustrates the way ontological difference compounds to occlude those who it negates.

While Solomon enacts the conscripts of Modernity, they also narrativize the story in a way that moves toward a referent and collective We. Although *An Unkindness of Ghosts* reproduces many of the horrors of slavery, Solomon appears to take great care to attend to the fullness of their subjugated characters. The X-deck, which Aster describes as "smell[ing] of decay" and full of "ghosts of the past refusing to be forgot" is also a place that houses Aster's botanarium that she returns to with "eyes closed reverently" (Solomon Ch. 3 - 4). The corridor is a place of surveillance and simultaneously a makeshift theater full of "plopped mattresses on top of each other to watch them perform, stacks of six, then stacks of four, then stacks of two, so everybody who came could see the stage" (Solomon 14). Solomon's conception of *Matilda* calls to mind the paradox of space that many Black non-Men find themselves occupying. While these decks of *Matilda* restrict Lower Deckers to the poverty, lack of opportunity, mental, physical and sexual trauma, they are often the only places they have any chance of escaping the surveillance of the white gaze (although their refuge is sometimes invaded). Additionally, they are also one of the only places they have a measure of something resembling autonomy or what Harriet Ann Jacobs calls a "loophole of retreat."

Jacobs describes the 9' x 7' x 3' garret space above her grandmother's house where she spends seven years of her life in extreme physical and mental anguish, hiding as a fugitive slave, as a rodent ridden, dark, stifling "oppressive place" (96). Along with the abysmal conditions of the garret, Jacobs' time confined within it also left her forever physically and emotionally altered. Despite the impact of her imprisonment there, Jacobs still says she would choose the garret over enslavement. All but one of the "loopholes of retreat" in *An Unkindness of Ghosts* do not occupy the same Western geographical unknowingness as the garret. Nor do they afford the characters the ability to watch what happens on the ship without being seen themselves. However, within their own "loopholes of retreat," the characters still find ways to commit acts of resistance and outright rebellion. Aster and Giselle refuse to reproduce a baby for the state and Theo carries out a sterilization crusade against fertile Upper Deck men, which he couches in accepted religious terms. The characters find ways to subvert the stratification of the ship. They arm themselves, attack and murder a guard, infiltrate the largest political gathering in their society, and carry out a successful revolution. Solomon rewrites the accepted history of enslaved peoples and incorporates their very real resistance through sexual experimentation, reproductive choice, the mutual aid they provided each other, and their very audacity to live. Their insistence to live is grounded in the subversive ways they utilize space.

In addition to using their novel to unsettle accepted Western versions of history and space, Solomon also uses it to incorporate and uplift alternate ways of knowing and understanding. I argue that the form of *An Unkindness of Ghosts* and the stories placed

within it are an example of autopoiesis. *An Unkindness of Ghosts* is made up of four sections. The first three section's names correspond to a scientific principle. However, those scientific names also tie to that section's thematic meaning. For example, the first section is titled "Thermodynamics." This branch of science deals with the relations between heat and other types of energy and, by extension, the relationship between all forms of energy. "Thermodynamics" provides the exposition of the novel and introduces *Matilda's* inhabitant's relational dynamics. Additionally, the Sovereign's decision to funnel heat away from the Lower Decks to try and combat the blackout serves as the impetus for the eventual rebellion. The Sovereign's manipulation of the entropy and distribution of heat aboard *Matilda* leads to an increase in entropy (chaos) for society. This interplay between the natural and humanist in the form of a story breaches the scientific/humanistic dichotomy and is Homo Narrans and autopoiesis as praxis.

Solomon's intentionality with form and language continue with the language they include in their novel. Instead of dealing with the limits of our everyday terms they make up their own that are inclusive of the most liminal modes of the hybrid human. For example, Tarlanders (a population of people on *Matilda*), do not express gender in the way the rest of the population does. Solomon describes Tarlander bodies as not being, "as clearly male and female as the Guard supposed they ought," and depicts Aster as having a, "...hair[y] and muscular build despite being born without the external organs that produced testosterone" (Solomon Ch. 2). Instead of using a traditional term to label Tarlanders, Solomon instead invents the term "hereditary suprarenal dysregula." Solomon resists imposing the culturally specific descriptive codes of Western-society and creates

new language that does not subject their characters to our normative codes of understanding. Additionally, each lower level floor experiences and describes gender using their own descriptive codes. Solomon's Lower Deck characters eschew our prescriptive methods of relating to one another. The conception of gender in the Upper Decks does not possess this fluidity. Theo recounts his father's dismay about his appearance, "...[he] thought Birdy too feminine a nickname. I was already prone to an unnatural girlishness, and, Heavens, don't encourage the boy, Ms. Melusine. My sissyness and my sickliness were two sides of the same coin to my father. I was weak and didn't belong" (Solomon Ch. 7). Solomon restates the Upper Deck's description of gender when Theo labels himself, "a queer. Not a man or how a man's supposed to be" (Solomon Ch. 7). The inclusion of the Upper Deck's rigid theorization of gender and orientation, which mimics our own theorizations, juxtaposed with the Lower Deck's conceptions displays the violence of our current structures and reminds us that there are modes of being outside of our current prescriptions.

Solomon's inclusion of non-Western epistemic beliefs also dislodges the fallacy that the Western-epistemically bounded Man is fully or more wholly human. By framing the novel from the perspective of the oppressed, Solomon elucidates alternative, superior cultural-specific viewpoints that are often obfuscated by the hegemonic discourse. They do this through the many stories the Lower Deckers share, the language of the Ifrek and their belief in a common ancestor. Along with the broader narrative, numerous parables, mythology, and creation stories comprise *An Unkindness of Ghosts*. Again, Solomon's work occupies the hybrid bios/mythos practice. As they rewrite the story of their

characters, they also lay the ground for us to envision the world in new ways. Giselle introduces the Ifrek language with the passage:

> in my language, there is no word for I. To even come close, you must say, E'tesh'lem vereme pri'lus, which means, This one here who is apart from all. It's the way we say lonely and alone. It's the way we say outsider. It's the way we say weak. Everyone always wonders about I love you. In Ifrek you say, Mev o'tem, or, We are together. "How do you say, I'm tired?" people ask. "Ek'erb nal veesh ly. The time for rest is upon us. (Ch. 26)

The Ifrek language embeds the referent We at its core. It was created with the collective in mind and seeks to hold everyone together. The language still has space for the outsider, so we know it does not fully realize the "Word" for our transformative mutation. However, its inception predates the Darwinian rupture on the *Matilda,* and it illustrates that a poetic, Black-centered episteme came before the ruptures of Man. Solomon reifies Blackness' nearness to the We with a story about the Lower Decker's ancestors. They write, "these are symbols of the people who came before us, whose lives were so great they became gods. They exist inside you because we all have a common Ancestor. Understand, babwa? They are far away from us now" (Solomon Ch. 13). For the Lower Deckers the world is not framed in binaries and divisions. They recognize our *co*-humanity.

Aster's mother formulates a code that is attentive to the scientific and the essence of life. She encodes her menstrual cycle as, "a leak in Laurel Wing's pipes" (Ch. 4). When she is pregnant with Aster, she shares the wing's pipes had "sorted themselves out" (ch.4).

The side effects she suffers after radiation poisoning are described as, "maintenance required in various L deck systems. The speakers blare static despite a lack of sonic input. Happens sporadically but still worth further investigation. There are some obvious issues in L deck's wiring…" (ch.4). And she expresses her personal feelings in language that is scientifically related to the ship as well. Lune's code is not limited to one language. The entry, "there are things I'd like to tell my mother," draws on her native tongue and her adopted one to indicate a phrase is highly secret (Solomon Ch. 6). Although Lune's writings do not follow traditional notions of poetry, they do occupy the liminal space between being and knowing and the natural. Lune's ability to combine the study of nature bounded in the "Word" in conjunction with the Lower Decker's understanding of working together as a collective and seeking progress for them all enables Aster to rupture the novel's conception of Man.

An Unkindness of Ghosts concludes with an actual leap that departs the violent shortcomings of Modernity. The moment of uprising for the Lower Deckers of the *Matilda* results in another tearing of the World. This time, the fissure sends the narrative back to Earth. Here, we return to Harriet Ann Jacobs' "loophole of retreat." The departure from *Matilda* comes from a Shuttle Bay hidden behind a false wall that was created centuries ago. This Shuttle Bay has existed outside of the Upper Decker's spatial mappings and the only characters who appear to be aware of its existence are Black non-Men: Aster's late mother Lune, Aster, and Giselle. Solomon seems to make the Shuttle Bay's reference to Harriet Ann Jacobs' time confined in the garret even clearer when Aster finds her mother's bones within one of the shuttles. Jacobs was able to use the

vantage of the garret to look out over the plantation and plot to keep her children free. Similarly, in the Shuttle Bay and control room, Lune was the only person other than the Sovereign with a view of the stars. She used that view to create a star map for her child to escape *Matilda*. The Shuttle Bay becomes a space of retreat from hegemonic domination. Freedom comes from a space based in literal and literary Black feminist geography. Importantly, the character who is sent off to inhabit that new terrain is Aster. The Black, formerly enslaved, hereditary suprarenal dysregula, neuro-atypical, gendered outside of our language person who occupies every liminal category that the Western-episteme currently conceives. Within her, exists possibility for imagining our world anew. By writing her, Rivers Solomon breaks out of our current genre-specific terms and moves us one step closer to "words made flesh, muscle and bone animated by hope and desire, belief materialized in deeds, deeds which crystallize our actualities. . . . And the maps of spring always have to be redrawn again, in undared forms" (Sylvia Wynter. "On Being Human as Praxis" 1). In authoring the literary geographies of *An Unkindness of Ghosts*, Solomon exposes newly imaginable futures.

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